THE COTTONWOOD BLACK

It would be impossible to write about Macleod without telling the tale of a famous horse — a black horse, a cool black horse named Midnight.

PP In 1915 Jim McNab left his ranch on the Cottonwood, not far from ~~the town of~~ Macleod, and went to war. ~~Jim was young, and when he departed, he was rapidly becoming one of the best riders in all Canada.~~ In France he fought long and well . . . clear through until the Armistice on November 11, 1918.

While he was away a number of colts were foaled on the ranch; among them a coal-black, offspring of a thoroughbred mother and a Morgan-Percheron sire. From the mother the colt inherited speed and courage, from the father, strength and size. As the youngster grew, he developed such spirit and love of independence that the boys on the ranch often commented that he would develop into a great range horse -- if anybody could break him. They called him Midnight.

When Jim returned to the Cottonwood, Midnight stood fifteen and a half hands high, a magnificent young horse, completely wild, ready to be broken, and there was much speculation among the ranch-hands as to whether the boss would attempt the job.

McNab, however, was eager to get back into the routine interrupted by the war, and one of the first things he did on his return was to set about breaking the young

horses raised during his absence. He knew that Midnight would probably offer the biggest task of all the young stock, and McNab decided that he would break the other horses first. The boys thought maybe Jim had forgotten how to ride, but he showed them that he still knew the tricks, and had very little trouble breaking a number of the young, green horses. Finally it was Midnight's turn.

Midnight was driven into a small pasture with a number of tame horses, and when the horse had finally been cut out and into the corral, Jim knew that he was facing the struggle of his life. Midnight was roped, saddled, and at last it was time for Jim to mount. The boys had long been looking forward to the contest, and they knew, as did Jim, that if Midnight could buck as well as he looked, the chances were slim that the boss could "stick him".

Jim mounted, and when the "blind" was jerked, Midnight paused a moment, perplexed by the human weight on his back; then he headed for the open corral gate, and the friends grazing outside in the pasture.

The boys said afterwards that they had never seen such a bucking . Jim lasted exactly five jumps; was thrown off and hit hard.

The boys were watching the boss, wondering how he would take it; but Jim only said:

"Get him back in here."

Once again the black was driven into the corral, roped; and once again Jim climbed aboard. This time he lasted a couple of jumps longer before he was thrown with such terrific force that the boys ran to see how badly he was hurt. But Jim wasn't hurt. He got to his feet, gazed after Midnight who had once again rejoined his friends in the pasture, and said:

"Boys, that black will be the greatest horse in all Canada. Just drive him back in here."

This time, before mounting Midnight again, Jim sat with the other men and discussed the young horse's technique. Midnight resorted only to straight bucking. He didn't "sun-fish" or "fence-row" as so many bucking horses do in order to get rid of their riders.

Jim was thrown a third time, and now the boys expected the boss to resort to unfair tactics in order to break the spirit of the black, but Jim refused to do this. If the horse played fair, Jim would also play fair. On his third attempt, Jim had lasted a few more jumps, and he believed that eventually he could ride "that black devil".

At the end of the day, both Jim and Midnight were worn out, but Jim had ridden Midnight without breaking the spirit of the big black horse.

Midnight learned fast after that. He became one of the best cutting horses in Jim's outfit. But only Jim could ride him. If any other cowboy tried it, he was promptly bucked off and with such force that he didn't care to attempt the job again.

Between Jim McNab and Midnight grew a strong friendship, but even Jim had to be careful. If the black fancied himself mistreated, or his natural love of freedom threatened, in any way, he would buck, and when he bucked, even McNab was not able to ride him. The horse had never been extended and his "bottom tested", so when Jim had to make a trip to a ranch some ninety miles away, he ~~thought he'd ride~~ rode Midnight. ~~If the horse became tired he could stop over at a ranch on the way~~. When the time came for them to leave, Midnight started out proudly, head high, and never stopped once for the whole ninety miles. ~~Neither~~ Nor did Jim have to use spurs.

Jim McNab was very proud of Midnight. He was certain that no man except himself could ride the black. Many persons urged Jim to enter the horse in various stampedes, and finally, because of his pride, Jim entered Midnight in the stampede at Macleod, held to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the coming of the old Royal Canadian Northwest Mounted Police. Jim led Midnight into the arena, and there are many who remember what a magnificent horse the big black

looked that day. He towered above the ordinary stampede horses, and really "stole the show" though he gave the two riders who had drawn him very little satisfaction. He piled them both in short order.

As time went on Jim entered Midnight in other stampedes at local points, and always he bucked off any rider who was brave enough to climb on him. Jim feared that punchers gouging Midnight with spurs would make him an outlaw, and this proved correct; but Jim could not resist seeing the big horse spill the arrogant riders of the Red Deer and Medicine Hat outfits who claimed they could ride him.

Under repeated urging, and taunted by the boasts of would-be conquerers of Midnight, Jim entered him in the big Calgary stampede in 1924. Interest ran very high, and many excellent riders, drawn by the large purses, and the fame that would come to them, were they able to ride Midnight, entered ~~in~~ the contest. The contest was to last three days, and McNab deeply regretted that he had consented to enter his beloved Midnight -- well knowing the punishment the horse would receive. But Jim had given his word and took the horse, who showed nervousness, and was plainly displeased with the whole proceeding. He showed the strain particularly when he was tightly cinched, placed in the narrow chute and surrounded by strangers.

McNab stood by and watched the struggling throng as horses were liberated from the chutes with riders up. He had been pleased when he had learned that one of the most

boastful riders from the Red Deer outfit had drawn Midnight; but Jim was also regretting his decision to enter the horse. For Midnight was excited. He had been taken from the quiet Cottonwood, away from his friends and placed here among strange men who prodded him through the bars of the chute.

Finally Midnight's turn came. It was plain that the horse was insulted and mad clean through. The Red Deer rider took his seat, touched Midnight with the spurs. The signal sounded, the gate flew open and Midnight leaped. On the third jump, he spilled the boaster . . . almost "busted" him, for the man lay still and had to be helped up.

The other great riders were not so confident when they actually beheld Midnight in action. The horse was heroic. In the entire three days, not a single rider was able to stay on his back. Midnight was acclaimed the champion bucking horse of Western Canada.

But Midnight played fair. Not once did he try to kick or jump on a fallen rider. He appeared satisfied when they were bounced off his back, and sometimes he even turned and placed his nose on the fallen man and trotted back to the chute!

During the Calgary stampede, McNab had many offers to sell Midnight; but Jim loved the fearless black and refused them all. He took Midnight back to the Cottonwood, and

let him rest from the exciting struggle. But the relationship between them was changed. Midnight would still come to McNab's whistle or call, and in other ways still showed affection for the boss; but he never forgot or forgave the cruel treatment he had received at Calgary. When McNab tried to ride him, Jim was quickly bucked off.

McNab had feared that this would be the case. He didn't blame Midnight, but was deeply grieved that he had consented to the maltreatment of his great friend.

Possibly it was his grief that led Jim to sell Midnight, for the horse was now an outlaw and fit only for the arena. He was sold to Peter Welch of Calgary who toured Canada and the United States with his string of rodeo horses.

And now began Midnight's great career as a rodeo horse. His fame spread. He became one of the most renowned horses in America.

One of the best riders in the United States came to grief at the hands of the Canadian champion. Bobby Askins of Ismay, Montana, came halfway across the continent to ride Midnight at Toronto in 1926. For four successive days, Askins watched Midnight buck his men off in the preliminary contests. On the night before the final day, he expressed the hope that he would draw the big black in the finals.

Askins drew Midnight and twenty-thousand fans crammed the huge stadium at the Toronto Exposition grounds to see

the ride.

It was a good ride, but a short one. When the chute gates opened up, Askins spurred Midnight right behind the ears. The black horse was so astonished that he stood stock still. The packed grandstand roared with laughter as the big horse walked out of the chute with short, mincing steps.

Pete Knight who was perhaps the greatest rider in the world at the time, whispered to a friend, "I wouldn't want to be up there right now for all the money in the world!"

But Midnight was already in action. Down went his head, and on his first terrific leap, he almost shot the Montana cowboy out of the saddle. He clawed his way back desperately, but to little avail. On the eighth jump Midnight tossed Askins high in the air, and then for another four jumps he pitched so high and so hard that one of the stirrups smashed in two as it hit its mate over the saddle.

"He's even better than they told me he was," said Askins as they helped him to the first-aid tent.

Two weeks later at Montreal, Pete Knight and Midnight staged the greatest tussle in the memory of the cowboys of the period, and though Pete was still aboard at the conclusion of the ride, he stated that it was the most terrific ride he had ever experienced. This was one of the very few times Midnight was ridden in his thirteen years of rodeo competition.

Midnight was not a "wild" type of outlaw. By nature he was gentle. He would do anything for a few lumps of sugar. He grew to love the competition of the arena, but he never resorted to tricks to unseat his riders. He simply put his head down and bucked, higher and higher at every jump, until on the fifth or sixth jump, he would give a little twist which seemed to catapult the rider out of the saddle as though shot from a gun.

He loved to travel, and when he was sold to Elliot and McCarty of Johnstown, Colorado, he got a chance to travel ~~all over the world~~ -- from Calgary to Fort Worth; from Cheyenne to Madison Square Garden, and finally to Europe.

Midnight died at Elliot and McCarty's Johnstown ranch in 1936. He was twenty years old.

His owners placed a gravestone over his resting place as a tribute to his courage and love of liberty, and on the stone they ~~h~~ inscribed this verse:

Under this sod lies a great bucking hoss,
There never lived a cowboy he could not toss.
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If there is a hoss heaven, please God, rest his soul.

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C.2

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MIDNIGHT -- KING OF CORRALS

Famous Broncho Skilled Riders from Alberta to Rio Grande. (April, '38)

In considering heroic horses who fought for the open range and liberty, we find that most of them were of Spanish breeding, but our records show that the King of Corrals and Rodeos -- Midnight -- was a well-bred horse.

His mother was a thorough-bred and his sire was a Morgan-Percheron. Hence from his mother he inherited great activity and speed; from his sire, marked powers of endurance and great strength. Wide experience proves that many horses rebel against being made slaves for men; are rebellious and resist being saddled; in the corral they seek the remotest point away from the rider with a rope -- never become gentle and kind to handle. Midnight was a shining exception.

Midnight was foaled in 1916 and He was raised on the extensive cottonwood ranch of Jim . McNab, near old Fort Macleod, ~~foaled in the year 1916~~. Jim was serving in the World War, and on his return to the ranch, after the War, he commenced to break the crop of young horses raised while he was absent. Jim began breaking horses when he was 10 years old, and when 16 he was gentling broncs for the Mounted Police -- he was one of the most skilled riders in Canada.

Among the young unbroken horses was a "coal" black, standing about 15½ hands high, superbly built, who exhibited marked energy and looked as proud as a peacock. Because of his splendid appearance and proud bearing he was left until near the last to be broken. ~~The~~ Jim owner wished to take more time in breaking such a splendid horse, and After subduing many of the youngsters, Jim considered himself tough

and able to top the worst one in the corral, and looked forward with keen interest to breaking the young black -- hoping to make of him the best horse of his outfit. Finally he looped the black and the show started. Because of the size and known activity of the ranch horse, the boys on the ranch knew that if ~~he~~ Midnight could buck as well as he looked, Jim would find him plenty tough. In front of the corral was a small pasture in which a few gentle horses were kept, and this morning the range horses rounded up with the Black, were quietly grazing there, while Jim was busy trying to saddle the black one. He finally got him saddled, gently rubbed his hands over the hips and shining neck of the black, "eased" himself into the saddle, and jerked the "blind".

The horse ~~was~~ headed for the corral gate and with mighty leaps of straight bucking he made for the outside range and his friends. Just outside the corral gate Jim was thrown high, hit the ground with a thud, while ~~the black one~~ Midnight hurried to rejoin his friends.

The boys on the fence stated Jim lasted five jumps! The boss, tough and unhurt, demanded that they round the horses back in the corral and that he would ride "that black hoss". The horses were soon again run into the corral; the black roped and snubbed -- Jim mounted him and he was liberated. The ranch boss said they never beheld such a buckin -- he landed Jim on the fourth jump and proudly trotted out to the bunch again!

Things began to look serious. It was plain that this young horse was a marvel in bucking -- his leaps were so high and hard that the ~~driver~~ rider could just not stand the strain. It was observed that each time the horse was handled he became more gentle, and Jim now had his "dander" up -- determined to ride the Black. Just as soon as

he got Midnight in the corral, again, Jim mounted him ~~again~~ and lasted a few more rd jumps, but was again thrown -- hard. Most riders now would have abused the horse -- "hobbled" their stirrups and rode him. Not so Jim: that hardy puncher was a man of marked courage and chivalry, and told the boys that if he could ever ride and break the Black, he would be one of the greatest horses in all Canada. ~~He~~ Jim sat down with ~~them~~ the other men and rested, and all hands discussed the strategy of the powerful Black. The horse did not resort to fence rowing or sunfishing, but employed straight bucking. Finally, after numerous other attempts, Jim was able to ride Midnight. The horse learned fast, and developed into one of the best cutting and roping horses on the ranch. But, if he fancied himself mistreated in any way, he would buck, and ~~never again was~~ if he bucked was never Jim McNab, able to ride him, ~~if he bucked~~ Midnight's spirit and courage never wavered, and he yielded only to kindness and love of his owner. He was a "one man" horse and dared all but ~~Mac~~ McNabb to ride him -- threw every ranch hand who tried to ride him and trotted to McNab in triumph! The horse was now about grown, but had never been extended and his "bottom tested". ~~The boss~~ Jim had to make a trip to Hall's ranch north of the Big Bow river, a distance of 90 miles. He decided to ride Midnight and test his endurance, planning that if he became tired he could stop at a ranch on the way. The horse moved out splendidly -- head up and anxious to go forward. He never stopped until the 90 mile trip was over, & Spurs were never required to urge him on.

The fame of the Cottonwood Black spread to all ~~of~~ the ranches in Southern Alberta, and after repeated invitations, McNab finally entered him in bucking contests at local points. He feared that punchers gouging him with spurs would ruin the gallant horse and make him an ~~possible~~ outlaw. This proved correct. But Mac could not resist seeing the horse spill the arrogant riders of the Red Deer and Medicine Hat outfits, who were boasting they could ride him. Finally

the big Stampede day came at Calgary and the best riders were attracted by large purses to try their skill. Especially if they could ride Midnight their fame was assured. Several came from Great Falls and Cheyenne. The contest was to last three days, and Jim McNab deeply regretted that he had promised to enter his beloved Midnight -- knowing the punishment he would encounter. But he took the horse, who showed nervousness and was plainly displeased at the whole proceedings. Especially when he was tightly cinched and placed in a narrow chute, surrounded by strangers, who prodded the horses while riders waited their turn to ride. McNab stood by and watched the struggling throng as horses were liberated from the chutes with riders up. Midnight was excited; he had been taken from the quiet Cottonwood, away from his friends and placed here among many horses unknown to him. But Mac was pleased when it was announced that one of the riders from the Red Deer outfit had drawn Midnight and was boasting that he would ride the Black Devil.

Finally the Red Deer riders turn came, and it was plain that Midnight was insulted and mad clean through when the ~~Red Deer~~ rider took his seat and touched him with the hated spurs. The signal sounded; the gate flew open, and Midnight leaped and the third jump spilled that boasting Red Deer puncher -- almost, "bustedW him, for he lay still and had to be helped up. The other aspiring punchers were not so confident when they beheld the mighty Midnight in action -- he was heroic! During the three days' rodeo not a single rider was able to stay on his back, and he was acclained the champion bucking horse of Western Canada. But he was game and fair; not once did he try to kick or jump on a fallen rider -- appeared satisfied when they were bounced off his back, and he sometimes turned and placed his nose on the prostrate rider and trotted back to the chutes. Among

those attending the rodeo was Peter Welch of Edmonton, who watched the horses with keen interest, and admired Midnight. Welch had a string of bucking horses which he took to rodeos, and he wanted Midnight; made a proposition to Mac to buy him. But Mac loved the fearless black and refused all offers.

He took him back to the Cottonwood and let him rest from the exciting struggle at Calgary; but he was never the same again. He would come up to Mac's call or whistle, and showed his affection for the boss, but he never forgot or forgave the cruel treatment he was subjected to at Calgary, and when Mac tried to ride, he was promptly bucked off. Mac feared this would be the case; did not blame Midnight, but was deeply grieved to realize that he had consented to the maltreatment of his noble friend.

If the reader is inexperienced in range life, he is advised that there exists between a rider and his horse -- if he be a merciful man -- a deep attachment. To part with a horse he had raised, broke and loved, touched Mac deeply. But he had lost the confidence of his horse; could never again ride him, and finally sold him to Peter Welch, who toured Canada and the United States with his rodeo horses.

His fame spread, and Midnight now became one of the most renowned horses in America -- no man had ever been able to stay on his back. After several years, Welch tired of the game and sold the horse to McCarty and Elliott of Johnstown, Colorado.

This firm directed rodeos and placed their horses in contests from Calgary to Fort Worth; from Cheyenne to Madison Square Garden -- finally they went to London. During all this time he was never riden but twice at Fort Worth, when he was sick, and Verne Elliott,

who during this time had become greatly attached to the noble horse, took him to the Johnstown ranch, where he died at the age of 20 years.

It took thousands of years for the ~~Genus Homo~~ human race to produce Hannibal and Caesar; Napoleon and Washington, and among millions of horses the life and character of Midnight stand out like a ~~diamond~~ meteor in the dark! For 10 years he beat the best riders of America and Canada -- Earl Thode, Pete Knight, Doff Aber, Eddie Woods and Paddy Ryan were all piled by this heroic horse, who sleeps in a grave near Johnstown, Colorado. He was buried by McCarthy and Elliott who loved and admired him; and they placed a gravestone over his last resting place as a tribute to his courage and love of liberty, and inscribed the following lines on the stone:

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And Jim McNab stated, ~~more~~

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Millions of Americans who saw this heroic horse in action will never forget him and the riders who tried to stay on his back, will ever praise his prowess, and cherish his memory.